



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

Honorable Henry A. Waxman  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D. C. 20515

Dear Mr. Waxman:

The Secretary has asked me to reply to your letter regarding visa policies of Saudi Arabia as they affect American Jews. You ask what is the US position with regard to these Saudi visa policies and the nature and extent of US acquiescence or participation in these policies.

It is the established position of the United States to oppose and to eliminate, where it is in our jurisdiction to do so, discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin. Our position was most recently reiterated by the President on February 26 in connection with reports of attempts in the international banking community to discriminate against certain institutions or individuals on the basis of religious or ethnic grounds. I believe the President left no doubt about the position of the Administration and the United States that such discrimination is totally contrary to the American tradition and repugnant to American principles.

Both through public statements and in our private contacts with governments whose policies we consider discriminatory, we make certain that they understand our position. When other governments' actions include discrimination against American citizens and those citizens seek our assistance, as in the case of applicants for visas to Saudi Arabia, we render assistance. As you have correctly noted, our interventions have been successful in a number of instances. In the final analysis, of course, the decision about whom a government will admit to its territory is a sovereign matter. When another government exercises its sovereignty in ways we consider contrary to principles of non-discrimination which we believe should be universally applicable, we must make a judgment, in deciding how to respond to such a situation, as to what will best serve our overall national interest.

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The Department of State for its part pursues a non-discriminatory policy in the assignment of its personnel overseas. Allegations that other agencies may have discriminated are now under investigation pursuant to the President's directive. For the Department, it is part of our regulations. No post in the field and no office in State, AID, or USIA can refuse the assignment of an employee on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin. The U.S. Government, however, could not prevent another government from refusing to issue a visa to an officer assigned to duty in its territory, though we could, and would, object to such action in strong terms.

While we do not believe that any American foreign service personnel of the Jewish faith have been assigned to serve in Saudi Arabia nor do we recall any who have sought assignments there in recent years, we cannot state categorically that this is the case because our personnel records do not indicate the religious affiliation or conviction of the individual. Obviously, if such an officer applied for an assignment in Saudi Arabia, the application would be considered on its merits. Generally speaking, Jewish officers to the best of our knowledge have not sought assignments to countries known to practice discriminatory policies against Jews.

Finally, we believe that the best means to eliminate discriminatory policies against persons or companies in the Middle East is through efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace settlement in that region.

Sincerely,

Robert J. McCloskey  
Assistant Secretary  
for Congressional Relations

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Clearances: NEA:Mr. Sober  
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